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ABSTRACT

Traditional information services provision relies on the planned and logical building of a collection to meet current and future user information needs. This is achieved through the acquisition and discarding of material, which might ideally be based on a regularly reviewed collection development policy statement. The evolution of collection development policies facilitates discussion between user groups and service providers, bringing information professionals closer to those whose needs should be served, and assures that the materials selected and serviced by the information unit are worth the investment made in them. Information professionals whose careers have been based in library services are familiar with the mechanics of collection development and their application. Those now involved in the creation of company library Web pages, for providing user access to remote Internet resources as a complement to the physical collection held locally, may decide to devise collection development policies specific to Web page management. The priorities of a Web page collection development policy, and of the people involved in its planning and implementation, are different from those of a tradition (print) collection development policy. This raises issues of concern with regard to serving user information needs now and in the future. (Contains 20 references.) (Author)

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Resource management in the electronic environment: company library Web pages and collection development principles

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Abstract: *Traditional information services provision relies on the planned and logical building of a collection to meet current and future user information needs. This is achieved through the acquisition and discarding of material, which might ideally be based on a regularly reviewed collection development policy statement. The evolution of collection development policies facilitates discussion between user groups and service providers, bringing information professionals closer to those whose needs should be served, and assures that the materials selected and serviced by the information unit are worth the investment made in them.*

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Keywords: collection development, World Wide Web, Internet, home pages

1. Introduction

This paper discusses the principles of collection development policies for print and electronic information resources as described in the library and information management literature. The results of a telephone survey on the degree to which British company libraries are networked, and a subsequent questionnaire on the development of collection development policies completed by those offering library Web pages, are presented.

2. Collection development and collection development policies — definitions

2.1. Collection development

Collection development has been described as 'a planning function for the systematic and rational building of a collection' which 'relates to the selection and acquisition of material for an expanding collection, and decisions on the material to be included in that collection' (Ref 1). As well as considering the addition of new materials, the maintenance of a live, balanced, up-to-date collection depends upon the withdrawal of items which are used infrequently or are obsolete (Ref 2).

2.2. Collection development policy

The collection development policy is a stated description of 'the collection as it is now, as it will be developed, and defines the rules directing that development' (Ref 3). As a working document it is reviewed and revised continuously.

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3. Policies with a purpose

There are two main reasons for devising and running a collection development policy.

3.1. Institutional goals, changing service requirements and meeting user information needs

A priority of the librarian is to ensure that the information needs of the user community can be met. In the company library context, the information professional contributes to the organisational effort devoted to achieving business objectives. Although this can be achieved without formalised collection development activity, following a documented policy can demonstrate more clearly how to address user information needs now and in the future, aligning service provision more closely with organisational goals (Ref 4).

3.2. Financial accountability

As financial accountability becomes more important (to check sensible spending, as well as ward off the threat of closure or out-sourcing of information services), planned resourcing of an information service is crucial. This 'informs a library's governing and funding body about the library's directions and provides a clear and carefully articulated rationale for its collection' (Ref 3).

Snow (Ref 5) notes how 'Along with a commitment to service and resistance to censorship, the necessity of the written collection development policy is part of the creed of librarianship' and demonstrates that 'as with many creeds, this one is honoured as much in the breach as the observance.' His review of the literature uncovered only two articles critical of the practice, and a large number which warranted the adoption of collection development policies for no other reason than the fact that they were 'essential'. This kind of unjustified statement can be found in the discussion of the electronic environment: 'Collection policies and procedures must be created for local developers of virtual libraries and for co-operative virtual collection programs just as they are for physical library collections' (Ref 6).

4. Policy parts

The components of a collection development policy are outlined fairly extensively in the library and information management literature (for example, Ref 2). General objectives outline the introduction and scope of a collection development policy (Ref 7). More specific issues addressed include:

- identification of the clientele to be served;
- subject boundaries of the collection;
- priorities and limitations governing acquisitions (e.g. selection, duplication, replacement, orders, donations and exchanges);
- cataloguing;
- retrospective conversion;
- preservation;
- fund-raising and budgeting;
- discard procedures (focused on the removal of older, outdated and inaccurate information sources from the collection, taking into consideration the age of the material, its physical condition, space restraints and availability of better sources);
- provision for periodic review and revision of policy;
- statements of present practice and future intentions.

5. Format-specific collection development issues

5.1. Special formats

The basic principles of a collection development policy should apply to *all* media managed by the library (Ref 8). However, *extra* provision needs to be made for sources which require special treatment due, for example, to size, durability, handling or means of access to the information. Newspapers and microforms fall into this category (Ref 7). For collections that include electronic media the question of equipment and staffing assume greater importance. The policy covers criteria relating to the information source *per se*, as well as to the devices which support its function with relation to cost, user interfaces and physical space, etc. (Ref 4). The collection developer also discovers a closer relationship with technical staff (Ref 9). It is not easy to find discussion of the creation and implementation of collection development policies for 'non-traditional' media. On completion of a survey of 69 academic libraries in the United States, Boyarski & Hickey stated that 'electronic formats and services, current

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hot topics in librarianship, are seldom mentioned.' In the sample policies provided in their text, allusions were found to locally produced media software, media equipment, instructional resource equipment, database services, CD ROM and networking for inter-library loan purposes (Ref 10).

5.2. General Web page design guidelines

Numerous sources, from downloadable files on the Internet to articles in magazines sold in corner shops, provide advice on Web page development. However, the focus of these is on the construction of page layout with regard to the use of HTML, graphics, interface design, link labelling and so on, rather than collection development issues. Drawing an analogy with a physical library, it is as though the presentation of the stock (through shelf arrangement, guiding and classification) is deemed more important than the information sources actually held.

5.3. Web page design and collection development literature

In the library and information management press, articles on Web pages come closer to considering collection development. For example, Falcigno & Green (Ref 11) provide practical hints in their paper on setting up a set of Web pages for a company library. These include establishing user information needs, adding new links as appropriate, checking the validity of existing links, allocating staff responsibilities and taking into account the legalities of providing information on the network. They counsel against adding links to 'interesting' sites: each resource identified for the Web page must fit in with the library's collection development policies. At the Untangling the Web conference held in Santa Barbara in Spring 1996 several papers related to Web page development and maintenance were presented (Ref 12). Tennant's paper on Web server management discusses user needs, fostering data owners and the formulation of Web policies. It also points to other resources of relevance to policy design and implementation (Ref 13). A number of academic libraries have provided accounts of managing their Web pages (Refs 14–16). An extensive listing of higher education and research library Web sites in the UK is included in the Exeter library and related resources guide (*http://www.ex.ac.uk/~itilsed/lib/uklibs.html*).

6. British company libraries and Internet resources

For the purposes of the research project described in this paper a number of company librarians were approached. A systematic sampling method was employed to identify respondents from a directory (Ref 17) and subsequently a telephone survey was conducted with 56 individuals. The initial interviews sought to establish the degree to which British company librarians have access to Internet resources, and to seek subjects for a follow up questionnaire on library Web page development.

It was found that 73% (41) of the company libraries had Internet connections. The Internet was regarded as a useful tool for communication (e-mail), for answering reference enquiries and sourcing grey literature such as product information. Of the networked libraries just four (7%) offered internal library home pages. However, 15 (i.e. just over a quarter of the total sample) planned to set up a home page in the near future. A number of librarians interviewed readily expressed misgivings about using the Internet as part of their information services portfolio, making reference to its lack of structure and control, fears about security and over-reliance on a system that might go down. This kind of comment has been typified in other recent research (Ref 18).

7. Company library Web pages and collection development policies

The four respondents who admitted that their library maintained a set of home pages agreed to complete a follow-up questionnaire. Of the four, three operate a collection development policy for their Web pages: one as part of the main policy, another as an independent policy and the third as a special library project. Two libraries also have stated policies for non-Web resources.

It was felt that adhering to a set of collection development guidelines is more important for networked resources than for the local physical stock. There were several reasons why the librarians advocated this, the most important being to provide clear accountability to finance managers. Running a Web-based service has visible implementation and maintenance costs for software and hardware. Spending has to be seen to be directed sensibly. The notion that 'if we can get it on the Internet it's free' is meaningless to those signing the cheques for new terminals or watching the daily Internet activities of information services staff.

At a more practical level, the aim of providing an organised collection of working links for users was identified as the second main reason behind referring to a documented collection development policy. The librarians interviewed were conscious of the wastefulness of browsing for information on the Net, and sought to use their skills in establishing some form of bibliographic control on the resources known to be useful to their user group. In all three Web collection development policies the criteria for maintaining consistency of style of the pages were also stated.

In the librarianship literature the most regularly quoted purpose of maintaining a collection development policy is to ensure that user information needs are met. Secondary to this is the notion that libraries can use their policy to ensure sensible spending. It would appear from these results that the relative importance of these two

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arguments is switched with relation to Web page collection development. Perhaps this is because offering a Web-based service is regarded as a luxury and, as such, has to be justified in financial terms before user information needs can be considered. As far as print sources are concerned, financial support for their management is more readily assumed; therefore focus falls on user information needs first.

A further difference between the operation of Web and other collection development policies is the number and type of people involved. In the sample firms only library staff and users had input to the collection development policies for print sources. For electronic sources (other than those accessed via the Web pages) administrators and staff became involved. With regard to Web page collection development policies, the library user group's involvement was replaced by that of managers and the organisation's PR function. It could be argued that when the media of the information moves from the traditional to the new (print to microform to CD-ROM to Web), more people join in the discussion of its management. As cost and technical dependence increase, so does the interest of management and technical staff. This might be to lower the risks of procurement mistakes, to meet with company information and PR strategies, or simply because library staff do not have confidence in their technical abilities. That the users had no involvement in the design of collection development policies for the Web pages in the sample here may be a cause for concern. How can a library service meet user information needs if they are not known and documented?

8. Rejecting the creed: why collection development policies are *not* devised

A straight reading of the librarianship literature would give the impression that libraries without collection development policies would be rare. However, all the case study firms identified at least one medium for which there was no collection development policy, demonstrating that 'its [collection development policy] acceptance in practice, as opposed to in theory, is by no means universal' (Ref 5). One respondent explained that there is no point in devising elaborate formal documents to help maintain a small subject-specific collection. Taking into account the number of individuals involved in the non-print policies described above, it might be the case that the effort of drawing up such a policy is simply not justified (Ref 19). It could be argued that this leads to unplanned, reactive working practices. However, librarians in this sample explained that user recommendations, customer demand as well as source availability, led their collection development for a media where a policy was not in operation. An alternative approach to the formal document replaces policies condemned as 'static, reactive and of little practical utility' that 'have outlived their purpose' (Ref 20). This might be preferable to upholding a policy which does not 'belong' to the users whose needs are to be served, as is the case in the three Web page policies of the sample firms. More serious are the dangers where budgets are erratic and service provision depends on the future upgrading equipment. An agreed policy alerts financial managers of future needs.

9. The future of collection development in the electronic environment

That electronic sources and their management are becoming more important in the company library context was evident in the words of one respondent who outlined selection policy: 'if you want to buy it, ask about electronic versions. If it is not too expensive or complex, we'll buy that in preference to print.' One respondent explained that the aspects of collection development activity (outlined in Section 4 above) will continue to be important, with a greater need for library staff to have a better awareness of technology to secure 'wider, more technically relevant coverage of the technically dense material required'. The format of the information sources managed does not change the general tenet of the librarian: 'we fit in the same way as we always have — by providing evaluation and collection expertise' (Ref 11). This should result in a balanced collection of physical stock, alongside 'owned' and remote electronic sources.

10. Conclusions

This study parallels others (for example Ref 18) in demonstrating that the Internet is yet to be adopted wholeheartedly by the British company library community. The disorganised and uncontrolled nature of the sources discourages its use as a valid resource. It might be regarded as ironic that those who *do* have the skills in evaluating and organising information sources are not yet at the stage of implementing plans to provide a useful interface to the Internet for their users through a set of internal library Web pages. Here lies an opportunity to promote the library, demonstrate its commitment to information provided in all formats, and deliver further networked services over both the intra- and Internet. This is of particular value to companies that operate across countries and time zones. Perhaps the reluctance is due to the perceived enormity of the tasks of implementation and maintenance of Web pages: the identification of material, its evaluation, organisation and so on, as well the necessity to seek training and train others. A fear of creating excessive demand may

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also be stalling development. Witness what the introduction of CD ROM abstracting and indexing services did to inter-library loan requests.

Although the initial purpose of this research project was to assess the applicability of traditional collection development principles to Web page development, concerns regarding the late involvement of company library staff in setting up internal home pages assume importance in the conclusions. The results of the questionnaire demonstrate how the user has dropped out of the planning of collection development policies when it comes to Web pages. Might we see a situation where library staff involvement is relegated in favour of that of systems or marketing personnel? The opportunity for library staff to share their expertise in the basic principles of library service, collection development and preservation with other professionals should not be missed.

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